

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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A DRAWN GAME.

BY BASIL.

AUTHOR OF "LOVE THE DEBT," ETC.

CHAPTER XXX. "PICTURE IT—THINK OF IT, DISSOLUTE MAN!"

THE policeman's gallantry was to some extent inspired by the suspicion, or certainty rather, that it was a case of attempted suicide, which, getting into the police-court and the newspapers, would cover him with glory. From a distance, and from the opposite side of the mill-race, he had seen the two sitting together; had then seen Archie leave her, seemingly stunned by his desertion; and finally had seen Anastasia rise suddenly and fling herself, as it seemed, headlong into the current. He had not the least doubt, therefore, that it was the old, old story of a love-lorn maiden seeking to end her sorrow with herself. Not being himself sentimental, he had no sympathy with such mawkishness, and was, therefore, aggrieved and gruff in his manner.

"What did you do that for?" he asked her querulously, as he wrung the wet from his tunic. "I say, what did you do it for?" he repeated more petulantly, shaking the stunned Anastasia by the shoulder.

He spoke as peevishly as though she had pushed him for sport into a puddle. But Anastasia, half-drowned and wholly dazed as yet, said nothing.

"Do you know that it's six weeks?" bending aside to catch the horror of her expression at this announcement. It was all very well to face death, but to face a police-magistrate! She couldn't have considered this. "Six weeks!" he repeated.

"Six weeks? What's six weeks?" asked Anastasia, bewildered, though she had now come to herself.

"An attempt to commit suicide. It's six weeks for an attempt."

"Do you suppose I threw myself in?"

"I don't suppose nothin', miss—I seed ye."

"You saw me! You saw me stretching out to reach a branch and I over-reached myself——"

"But not the law, miss; not the law. You'll not over-reach the law," interrupted the constable with a quickness which surprised and delighted himself.

"You want money, and I'm willing to pay you for saving my life," said Anastasia haughtily and indignantly, thinking she had got the key to the constable's offensive charge and manner. But she had not got it at all.

He was perfectly convinced that it was a case of attempted suicide, and assured that such a bribe as she could offer him would be poor compensation for the praise and promotion his rescue and arrest of her would secure him. But he was naturally delighted by this proffer of a bribe, which, when related in court, would at once confirm his charge and enhance his glory.

"I want nothin' for doing my duty, miss; and I'll take nothin' for not doing it," an epigrammatic way of putting his disinterested and incorruptible devotion to duty, which told strikingly afterwards in court.

For the case came into the Ryecote police-court, not without Anastasia's secret concurrence. On second thoughts it occurred to her that nothing would advance her designs upon Archie better than this belief in her attempt at suicide. Either Archie would be won back to her by this proof of her desperate devotion to him; or a British jury would be moved to award in a breach of promise case very substantial damages indeed on such moving and

unanswerable evidence of wounded affections. Therefore, Anastasia offered only enough resistance and defence to the charge to convince the court that she was anxious to shield, not herself, but her base deserter.

At first she clung feebly to the account she had given the constable; then she said only, and again and again, that she was very unhappy; while at the constable's evidence as to seeing a young man walk away from her just before, she hid her face in her hands, and her whole frame shook with convulsive sobs. But the name of this young man nothing could tear from her.

It was just the part which Anastasia, with her plaintive, appealing, deprecating eyes, could play to absolute perfection.

She played it with such effect that the whole court was moved to tears, and it would have gone hard with that young man if he had been known and at hand. However, as we have said, Anastasia nobly withheld his name. To reveal it would be to mar the effect of this practical appeal to Archie's feelings—her first card.

The case was reported not only in the local papers, but at less length in the London journals; one of which made it the text of a short leader, contrasting the Satanic baseness of our sex with the heavenly nobleness of women. And as this paper had either the largest circulation in the world, or a wider circulation than any other journal—we forget which—Miss Bompas's sublime devotion became extensively known. Mrs. Tuck read of it, and Dick and Ida. Fortunately, Mrs. Tuck and Dick had no idea of Ida's interest in the story.

"Miss Bompas of Heatherley!" exclaimed Mrs. Tuck. "We didn't know we had a heroine so near us." For Heatherley lay between Rycote and Kingsford. "I shouldn't at all wonder if it was that young Cuthbert of Hazelhurst," she added meditatively. "He deserves horsewhipping, whoever he is, for his heartlessness in allowing the poor girl to stand alone in the dock."

"On the face of it, it was only a lover's quarrel, and the girl's choosing to drown herself doesn't prove the man in the wrong—rather the other way, I should say," drawled Dick.

"Why didn't he come forward then and set himself right?" asked his aunt.

"What! At the girl's expense? You wouldn't give him a lash less of the horsewhip for that."

"Nonsense, Dick. A man who could

drive a girl to suicide is not likely to have much regard for her feelings."

"Drive her to suicide! That's just the question. Did he drive her to suicide? I believe it was all a bit of temper. A girl who could attempt suicide because of a lovers' quarrel is certain to have the temper that makes quarrels. The fellows take it for granted that she was a meek martyr, because she attempted to drown herself, which is just the thing which makes me suspect she was a fury."

Mrs. Tuck was silenced because she couldn't explain that she believed the case to be one—not of a lovers' quarrel—but of heartless betrayal.

Meanwhile Ida had listened in utter wretchedness to the discussion. As it was impossible there could be two women with so singular a name as "Anastasia Bompas" in the world, she had no doubt that this was the girl with whom Archie had got entangled at Cambridge. But was this man, whom every paper abused for his base betrayal and abandonment of her, Archie? She wouldn't, she couldn't, believe it. Yet it was possible. She had that morning got a letter from Mrs. John in which she said that Archie had left home, but she did not know either whither he had gone or when he would return. Why should his going and coming be kept a secret even from his mother?

Again, was it conceivable that this girl should have got entangled with another suitor at the very time when she was attempting, through her mother, a reconciliation with Archie? And what was Archie's description, or suggestion, of the character of the girl to his mother? That she was heartless and mercenary. Could a heartless and mercenary girl love so passionately as to attempt suicide in despair of the return of her attachment? And if she was the very reverse of designing, what became of Archie's account of his entanglement by her?

Ida, racked and tormented by these doubts, passed a day of extreme wretchedness in her room under the pretext of a headache. Here she wrote letter after letter to Mrs. John, tearing up each in turn as unworthy at once of herself, of Mrs. John, and of Archie. Finally she wrote only a short note to ask if the person mentioned in the accompanying newspaper could be the same Miss Bompas whom Archie knew at Cambridge.

But she had not to wait for Mrs. John's answer to have her doubt resolved.

Among Dick's duns was a gentleman of uncertain age, whom Mrs. Tuck held in high regard as Sir Arthur Denzil, a baronet of one of the oldest families, and of one of the largest properties in Great Britain and Ireland. So at least had he been introduced to her by Dick, whose authority for credentials (so irresistible to his aunt) was nothing less than Sir Arthur's own statements. Whether Dick himself accepted them as confidently as he had imparted them to his aunt, is doubtful. All he really knew about Sir Arthur was, that he had met and lost money to him at two or three race-meetings. When Sir Arthur turned up at Kingsford to dun him therefor, Dick dealt with him as young Honeywood dealt with his dun, little Flanagan—introduced him to his aunt as an old friend.

Mrs. Tuck was charmed with Sir Arthur. Had she not known him to be a man of family and property, she would have thought him free and flippant to vulgarity. As it was, she could not sufficiently praise the grace and ease of his manner, and the generosity of his deep interest in their concerns.

For the interest shown by Sir Arthur in their concerns was extraordinary. Having heard casually that Mr. Tuck had made no settlement of his affairs, he was most urgent upon that gentleman in season and out of season to consider the uncertainty of life in general, and of his own life in particular. Mrs. Tuck welcomed Sir Arthur's alliance as likely at least to persuade her husband to settle the promised ten thousand pounds at once upon Ida. Mr. Tuck, however, had, in his nervous state, the feeling about this ten thousand pounds expressed in the old man's proverb, "No stripping before bedtime," no resigning money or power into any hands but those of death. And he had also, of course, the converse feeling that, if he began to strip, it must be bedtime. Therefore, Mrs. Tuck's ding-dong dunning of him at bed and board for this big sum sounded to him like the tolling of a passing-bell, and when she was reinforced by Sir Arthur, who not only urged him to strip, but told him with engaging frankness that it was bedtime, he nearly gave in altogether. He was like a sick sheep, who might have struggled on a good deal longer but for the sight of the vultures wheeling above it in ever narrowing and lowering circles. In a word, it was due to some extent to Sir Arthur's generous interest in

his affairs that Mr. Tuck was now really as ill as he used to fancy himself.

And now it was reserved for Sir Arthur to give him the final blow.

"Has the old fellow another nephew named Guard — Archie Guard — Brabazon?" he asked Dick, as they were knocking about the balls in the billiard-room.

"Another nephew? He's his only nephew."

"What! The heir-presumptive?"

"Yes."

"Phew!" whistled Sir Arthur, stopping in the very act to make a stroke, and straightening himself to look amazed at Dick.

"What about him?" asked Dick, not eagerly at all, but with his usual languid indifference.

"I knew his father."

"That's bad. But, after all, your being his friend could hardly make Mr. Tuck think worse of his worthy brother-in-law than he does already." Sir Arthur scowled, but it wasn't his cue to resent Dick's jest-and-earnest sarcasms.

"I don't know that. At least, I think I could tell him something that would blacken him a shade or two deeper."

"If you could tell him something that would blot his son out once for all, it would be more to the purpose."

"I can do that, too. He's a chip of the old block, and no mistake."

Then Sir Arthur became lost in meditation. While he chalked his cue mechanically, his eyes were fixed on the billiard-table, and his thoughts went wandering far back to old days and scenes.

"Aye, he's a chip of the old block," he repeated, rousing himself, and recalling his thoughts to the present.

Dick, who wouldn't for the world betray any deep interest, and who, in truth, hardly felt any, remained provokingly silent. He knew perfectly well that, as his own and Sir Arthur's interests were identical in this matter, he need neither beg nor buy valuable information from his confederate. Besides, Dick, all his life, hated to raise his hand or open his mouth unnecessarily. Therefore, Sir Arthur was forced at last to give his information unsolicited.

"You know that girl they're making all this bother about—the girl who tried to drown herself?"

"Miss Bompas?"

"Yes. Well, he's the man."

"The fellow who drove her to it? How do you know?"

"Her mother, who's never sober, let it out last night in the Ellerdale Arms. I heard her myself. She said his name was Archie Guard; that he was Squire Tuck's nephew and heir, and that, therefore, he could pay, and must pay, handsomely for his treatment of her daughter."

This was great news for Dick, impassively though he received it. It must destroy Guard's last chance at once of Ida and of The Keep.

After looking at it from all points, he said significantly:

"It's a bad business. I only hope it won't get into the papers, as a scandal of that kind would kill Mr. Tuck."

"Not before he made his will. It would drive him to make his will at once—eh?"

"I suppose it would, if anything would," said Dick, with an assumption of indifference which didn't impose upon Sir Arthur.

"It's safe to get into the papers with that old sponge dropping it about in all the pubs in the place."

"Did she say he had deserted the girl?"

"Yes—'promised her marriage,' which is their way of putting it. He's his father's son all over."

Again Sir Arthur lapsed into meditation upon the past, from which he roused himself to ask Dick about Archie's father. Dick, of course, knew and cared nothing about him, though he would not be sorry to hear of anything to his disadvantage. Therefore, he listened with a growing interest to all Sir Arthur had to tell him to his discredit.

At the close of a long conversation upon this subject, Sir Arthur hurried away on urgent business which would probably involve absence from Kingsford for a couple of days. Still, he found time, before his departure, to act upon Dick's significant hint to communicate to the papers the name of Miss Bompas's betrayer.

For, next morning, Mr. Tuck read this paragraph, headed, "As We Suspected," in the "Ryecote Rights of Man," a fiery Red print:

"The dastardly betrayer of the wretched girl who was saved from suicide—hardly mercifully—by our gallant townsman, Police-constable Skinner, turns out to be, as we suspected, one of the Upper Ten. We must be on our guard against giving names, but we may say he is the nephew

and heir of a squire and county magistrate residing not a hundred miles from Kingsford. As this gentleman is in precarious health, the probability is that before very long his exemplary nephew will succeed to his position in the county and to his seat on the Bench. These be your governors, oh, Israel! Is it not monstrous?"

Mr. Tuck did not, of course, take in the "Ryecote Rights of Man," but a copy had been considerably forwarded to him with this paragraph marked appropriately with red ink. Its effect upon him may be imagined. He had a nervous dread and detestation of publicity of any kind, but publicity of this kind! His infirmity advertised! his speedy death discounted! His will made for him, and made in favour of this—this—— The paper dropped from his hand, and he lay back in his invalid-chair, white, speechless, and trembling.

"What is it? what is it, James?" gasped Mrs. Tuck, as she hurried, terrified, to his side.

He could only point to the paper. But it was not till she had got him back to bed, having given him some brandy, and brought him to somewhat, that she read the paragraph. Here was an unhappy business! Yet it was one of those troubles that are sent plainly for our good. It would disenchant Ida of Archie, and drive Mr. Tuck to make his will.

CHRONICLES OF ENGLISH COUNTIES.

SHROPSHIRE. PART III.

LEAVING Bridgenorth by the Shrewsbury road, some three miles along the way stands a retired village, whose name, Morville, connected with Morbridge, a little farther on, reminds us that we are passing that piece of waste ground called the Moors, in the county of Salop, for which the sheriffs of London and Middlesex do suit and service to this day in Her Majesty's Court of Exchequer. But even if the sheriffs had not appeared to the summons, little harm would have been done, for the City of London, if it ever had any valuable rights in the county of Salop, has long since lost them by disuse. The City sheriffs, it may be remarked, were not the original performers in this pantomime. The lordship of the Moor once belonged to the Knights Hospitallers of Jerusalem, and probably fell into the hands of the City of London

when the English branch of the order was dissolved.

After passing the Moor the road leads to the foot of a long range of hills, the backbone of the shire, and, like the more familiar hills of Chiltern, once a favourite resort of outlaws and robbers. Wenlock Edge is a noted feature of the South Shropshire landscape, but comes to a sudden end by Much Wenlock, where a hollow way, once the terror of travellers, overhung as it was by thickets and haunted by robbers, leads the traveller towards Shrewsbury. One of our earliest tourists, earliest, at least, in the way of taking notes with a view to publication—Welsh Gerald, Archdeacon of St. David's, and a noted churchman and litterateur about the court of Henry Plantagenet—records a visit here on his return from a tour in Wales, his companion being no less a person than Baldwin, Archbishop of Canterbury. "It was in that very year, A.D. 1188, when Saladin, Prince of the Egyptians and Damascenes, by a signal victory got possession of the kingdom of Jerusalem," and the archbishop and his attendants had been preaching the crusade among the Welsh chieftains and their wild followers.

The road over the Edge into Wenlock is described by Gerald as *Mala Platea* or Ill Street, being a hollow way bordered by thickets, and haunted by robbers. The entire length of way indeed from here to "*Malus Passus*," or Malpas, in Cheshire, had an evil reputation for travellers from its nearness to the Welsh border; and the towers of Wenlock were a pleasant sight from the wooded gorge to those who fared southwards, announcing that the worst dangers of the road were passed. The Priory of Wenlock, the cheerful sound of whose bells guided the benighted traveller on his way, although never a very large religious community, was yet of a good deal of importance and influence, and the ruins of the conventual buildings are of sufficient extent to give an interest to the history attached to them. The Priory was originally founded by a Mercian princess, one Milburga, daughter of Merewald, and it may be noted that her sister Mildred also attained saintly rank, and many ancient churches are under their patronage. A pleasant tradition was long current in Corvedale of how Milburga in her youth was beloved by a young and noble pagan; but Milburga would not wed with a heathen, and to avoid his solicitations retired with other holy women to

Wenlock, where they built a chapel and convent, over which Milburga was chosen Prioress. Some years after, the business of the order required her to visit a sister settlement of nuns at Godstow. The way was long and dangerous, and the other nuns earnestly dissuaded her from attempting it. But the prioress, confident in divine assistance, set forth on her way, riding, it is said, a milk-white mule. The nun followed no doubt the old Roman road that ran along Corvedale, a lonely secluded valley shut in between the long escarpment of Wenlock Edge, and the mystic heights of the Cleehills, bordered by forests and wild chases. In this lonely spot some Saxon noble had cleared a strip of ploughland; and now it was seed-time, and the thane himself was on the land watching his serfs as they scattered the seed, and dragged their rude bush-harrows over the soil. The nun's heart sank within her, for in the thane she recognised her old lover, who advanced to bar her passage. Nothing to him were the emblems of her sacred calling, neither to him nor the rude heathens who thronged about their chief ready to do his bidding. The woman he loved was his now, by right of capture; he would marry her after the manner of his ancestors, and carry her off to his hall in the woods. The nun could only appeal to Heaven for help, as she parleyed with her rough lover. Let him respect her honour and her vows, and surely Heaven would reward him with bountiful increase from the seed he was now sowing.

She pointed to the furrow'd field,
Lo! even as she spoke
From the dry seed up sprang green blade
And stalk and full ear broke.

The chief and his men drew back, overpowered with awe at the miracle which had been wrought, and the holy maid rode on her way unharmed.

The reputation of Saint Milburga seems to have spread even beyond the English border, and the Welsh called Wenlock *Llanmeilan*, which is their softened version of Church Milbury. But the sanctity of its founder did not preserve the Priory from desolation, no miracle intervened to save the convent from the fierce Danes, and it was not till after a century or more of abandonment that a new religious foundation was established on the old site by Earl Leofric and his wife, Godiva of legendary fame. The new foundation was for secular canons, a favourite establishment of the Saxons, who took to seclusion

and celibacy rather unkindly. After the Conquest these canons were displaced by Roger of Montgomery, the great feudal lord of the district, to make room for a new set of monks from Cluny.

An interesting consequence of the foundation of the Priory, and the reputation of the Cluniac order, is to be traced in the adoption by Fitzalan, Steward of Scotland, the founder of the Stuart line, whose descendants became eventually kings of Scotland and England, of the Cluniac rule in his newly-established monastery at Paisley in Scotland. The Steward of Scotland originally granted to Wenlock Priory, in consideration of its services to Paisley, certain rights and dues in Renfrewshire; but these the monks exchanged for the lordship of Menwode, or Manhood, in Sussex, and the district comprised the three-cornered peninsula, with its one point at Selsea Bill and the other at Hayling Island, which remained attached to Wenlock Priory till the Reformation. Wenlock also had a dependent Priory, or cell, at St. Helens, in the Isle of Wight, and as one of the chief of the thirty religious houses of the order, seems to have spread its influence far and near.

From Wenlock it would be a pleasant pilgrimage to follow the little river Corve from its source down secluded Corvedale, in the footsteps of St. Milburga. The dale is out of the way to anywhere, with no great mansions or populous settlements within its limits, but with fine old churches, testifying to the ancient prosperity of the valley, and here and there stand the mounds of ancient castles, and rings and entrenchments that were there before the castles; a strange wild background are the great, bare Clee Hills, which excite curiosity, mixed with a certain amount of repugnance. They seem to belong to an older world than ours, a world whose records and chronicles are lost. Had people ever reached the summit of the Clee Hills, and what did they see there? Strange weird creatures flitting about, flying lizards and saurians—relics of a primæval world? There is a feeling, too, that great events must have happened here, things strange and terrible, in the dim ages past. And yet tradition has preserved no traces of such things, as far as we can learn, nothing but the footsteps of St. Milburga, or the hoof-marks of her snow-white mule.

About these Clee Hills was a royal forest once, where we find the king's foresters levying "Doverelt," as they call it, on the tenants, little thinking how this was the

Welsh Dovraeth, or lodging-money, that the laws of Howel the Good allot to the prince on his journey. And half-way through our dale lies Castle Holgate, that carries the mind to the pleasant Norman coast where the Sieur of Holgate looked down from his house on the cliffs upon the wide plain of Dives, where William the Conqueror mustered his invading army. For the Sieur of Holgate was a great man under his chief, Roger of Montgomery, and built a castle here to dominate Corvedale; and so the village, which before then was called Stanton, from old Roman walls standing there no doubt, took the name of its lord. The Mauduits had the barony after that, but sold it to Richard Plantagenet, "King of Almaine," and he assigned the castle to the Knights Templars, and then, in some way, it got into the hands of the Howards, who, perhaps, hold it still.

And then, right over the hills and far away, on the other side of Titterstone Clee, lies Cleobury Mortimer, once the chief seat of the powerful historic family of Mortimers, a proud race, owing some of their qualities, perhaps, good and bad, to their descent from Llewellyn the Great. Through these Mortimers, our line of kings may claim to represent the ancient princes of Wales; a claim indeed associated with the awkward incident of Roger, the paramour of the She-wolf of France, hanged at Tyburn.

But few people come through Corvedale now, for the railway carries them on the other side of Wenlock Edge to a sort of spider's-web of junctions at Craven Arms, called after a noted coaching and hunting inn of ancient fame. The most charming railway journey in England is said to be that between Shrewsbury and Craven Arms, and thence to Ludlow, with every variety on the way of wood, and hill, and river scenery.

Half-way between Shrewsbury and Ludlow lies Church Stretton, in a romantic wooded gorge, with the wild Long Mynd rising behind it, in steep, precipitous heights, about which gather sudden tempests and storms, with fogs and snow-wreaths that have been fatal to many wayfarers.

Over beyond the Mynd, in the very lap of the Welsh hills, lies Clun, a secluded little borough, that must be interesting to any student of municipal institutions, with its constitution of a bailiff and thirty burgesses. Here are old customs, Welsh and English, strangely mixed up and intermingled. Old endowments, too, are

here, and a hospital, rich and dignified in its quaint Jacobean quadrangle.

Following the pleasant river Teme for a while, we come to the cheerful village of Bromfield with its quaint old church, close by which are some remains of a small Priory pleasantly placed in the fork of the river just above the junction of the Oney. The place is thus described by Leland: "The house stood betwixt Oney and Temde, Temde runneth nearest to the house itself. It standeth on the left ripe of it. Oney runneth by the bank side of the orchard, by the house touching it with his right ripe, and a little beneath the house is the confluence of Oney and Temde." Altogether a warm, sunny corner, with its orchard sloping to the river, and good fishing from the bank, a place that would reconcile anybody to a religious life.

And here again we may notice the strange names of the rivers hereabouts, names that we cannot safely attribute either to Welsh or Saxon. Temde indeed may pass for Celtic, having the same root as Thame or Thames; but who can make anything of Oney? And Corve is another puzzler, while the Rea, that joins the Severn lower down, is strangely unfamiliar. Rea and Severn indeed remind us of Rhine and Seine, and we have already alluded to Maas and Meuse.

"The scene changes, presenting Ludlow town, and the President's Castle; then come in country dancers, etc." Such are the stage directions in Milton's *Masque of Comus*. And no scene is more full of interest, romance, and sentiment than the first view of Ludlow town and towers from an adjoining height. The pleasant scenery of South Shropshire here concentrates in a grand sweep of hilly country, the hills assuming the dignity of mountains, without their bareness, but fertile to the top, marked out with hedge-rows and copses. Among these hills, above the quick and jubilant river, rises a fine detached bluff, and from its precipitous brow the massive towers of the castle show their hoary tints against the green mountain side, while from the lower part of the slope, the church, with its noble tower and fair proportions, seems to rise in triumph against its ruined and dismantled rival. Between the two cluster the roofs of the pleasant town, and verdant meadows encompass the whole, where fat Herefords graze in the sunshine among the subtle scent of spring flowers and new-mown hay.

Ludlow has not outlived its history nor outgrown it. Time has passed by it gently, and in its varied life, that begins one hardly knows where in fabulous antiquity, it has known no great catastrophe to destroy the outward evidences of its civic life; nor has it even much outgrown or much shrunk from its ancient limits. Old Ludlow was known ere the Saxons came into the land as *Dinan*, a name which conveys a sense of the fort on the hill and the river flowing below; just as other Welsh in their new home in Brittany called their little rock fortress on the Rance by the same name! And this original Welsh name is still preserved in the local name of Denham, an Anglicised form. Even in those remote days the place is supposed to have been famous for its manufacture of woollen cloth, and, when the fort on the hill was abandoned by the Welsh prince who maintained it, it is likely enough that the cloth-weavers still remained. Anyhow, it is pretty evident that the town retained its industry under the Saxon kings when there were coiners at work at a local mint, and when people made enough money to enable them to travel far upon holy pilgrimage.

But from this period the town no longer took its name from the dismantled fort, but from the *Hlew*, or *Low*, the mound which rose over against the castle hill, and which, under the Saxons, became the meeting-place of the folk-mote. At these meetings, which were attended by all the freemen of the district, armed with sword and spear, with their targets of rough bull's hide slung round their necks, all the business of the district was transacted. When a man inherited or acquired land, he appeared at the folk-mote on the proper law day, and openly maintained his right. If there were any gainsayer, the rival claims were discussed and decided, and the court was ready to carry out its judgment with sword and spear.

It is curious to find that long after these folk-motes had lost their original power, when lawyers and scribes had parcelled out the land into parchment-held divisions, the old fame of the *Low*, or *Mount of Lude*, still was remembered. A church had been built upon the site, and in digging away the old tumulus, the workers came upon traces of interments, which were probably pre-historic, but which the church-builders declared to be the relics of three Irish saints, who had been martyred by the heathen in these parts. And

so the bones of these perhaps savage chiefs were placed in richly carved shrines, and people found great efficacy in the relics. But anyhow, after the mound had been levelled, and the church built upon its site, a sort of virtue attached to the place, and we read of Love days, when meetings were held in the church itself, when people met and arranged for the transfer of their lands or holdings without the intervention of lawyers, and this lasted to the end of the thirteenth century.

Thus, as far as Low is concerned, the etymology of Ludlow is pretty clear, but in the Lude there is a difficulty. Probably the word is neither Saxon nor Celtic, but like some fossil bone discovered in the drift, reveals the existence of other races of beings, of whose existence this is the only record.

Among other Saxon institutions at old Ludlow, we find a certain guild of pilgrims, established to afford mutual assistance in such pious enterprises, and that the pilgrims of Ludlow had made themselves known in the world, we may infer from an account of two palmers of Ludlow in the story of Edward the Confessor's ring.

It was at the solemn dedication of the new Abbey on Thorney Island, afterwards to be known as Westminster, that, at the conclusion of the ceremony, when the pomp and splendour of the scene had faded away, a poor unknown wanderer accosted the king, and with gentle boldness demanded alms in the name of St. John the beloved. The king had no money on his person, and his almoner was not within call, and so he slipped from his finger a valuable ring, and handed it to the mendicant, who straightway departed. Some short time after this two English palmers, returning from the Holy Sepulchre, wandered lost and benighted in the Syrian desert. Suddenly an old man, benign and venerable, appeared before the pilgrims, and led them to a cluster of habitations, where they were hospitably entertained for the night. In the morning their guide was again at hand to set them on their way. At the moment of parting the old man's figure became suddenly radiant, as he addressed the palmers, and entrusted them with a sacred mission. They were to seek out King Edward and deliver to him a ring, which the saint placed in their hands. This ring was to be a token to the king that the limit of his earthly pilgrimage was at hand. Within six months after he received the ring King Edward was to pass from this world to join

the saints above. The palmers, awestruck and trembling, proceeded on their way, conscious that they had spoken with some heavenly visitant. Their journey to England was wonderfully rapid and prosperous, and ere long they reached the king's presence, and placed in his hands the ring he had given to the poor wanderer. Then all were convinced that it was indeed St. John himself who had appeared both to king and palmers, and the two latter returned to their homes at Ludlow, to hear presently how the summons of the saint had been obeyed, and the Confessor had departed to the heavenly kingdom.

But the palmers of Ludlow could have had no notion how deeply the Confessor's death would affect the destinies of their native town. Soon after the Conquest, the keen Norman glance discovered the strategical value of the old Welsh fort above the river, and presently a strong castle rose upon the spot. Roger de Montgomery was the great man of the district, but it seems that not he, but one of the De Lacys was the castle builder. Through the De Lacys the castle came to the Mortimers, and finally to the heirs of the Mortimers, the celebrated house of York. All this time the borough continued to exist, and the cloth-making went on prosperously. Men made fortunes in the business, and bought up the estates of the improvident Norman families, and the De Ludlows, who had been weavers in one generation, became great barons in course of time. In the fourteenth century Ludlow was taxed at a higher rate than Shrewsbury, and fourfold higher than Bridgenorth, but at that time its prosperity was evidently declining. The citizens complained bitterly of the weight of taxation and of the doings of the king, who had seized their wool at home and abroad, wherever he found it, to pay for his French wars. The town itself had been surrounded by ramparts in the thirteenth century, and when the wars of the Roses began it became a stronghold of the Yorkists. Thus the town was taken and plundered by the Lancastrians, the castle, it would seem, still holding out; but on the triumph of King Edward the Fourth the place found a certain compensation in the royal favour, and in the castle the young princes were brought up. There is still a chamber in the old ruins which bears the name of the Princes' Chamber. Thus, when King Edward died in London, there was, according to Shakespeare, something like a race between the queen's

brothers and the fateful Richard of Gloucester which should gain the advantage conferred by possession of the infant king and his brother.

"Towards Ludlow, then, for we'll not stay behind,"

cries Gloucester to his then faithful Buckingham. The journey ended fatally for the Rivers faction—for Rivers, Grey, and Vaughan—who were seized on the way, and hurried off to execution at Pontefract. It must have been a sad journey for the young princes with their stern uncle—the shadow of the dark Tower brooding over them—from Ludlow, with as little pomp and retinue as might be.

When Henry the Seventh, strong in Welsh attachment, was securely seated on the throne, he resolved to put the government of Wales and its borders on a new footing. Hitherto the country had been held rather than governed by the English, the garrisons of the strong castles exerting a lawless tyranny over their immediate neighbours, while in every fertile valley, where the mailed horsemen of the English barons could ride, castles of stone had been erected, and the English manorial system had been introduced. But among the hills the Welsh tribesmen still held their lands by the innate right of freemen, although their hereditary chiefs were doing their best to convert their tribal superiority into the hard cash of annual rents. With all this, life was insecure, and the laws practically left to administer themselves. The local judges were often threatened by the relatives of those they condemned, and sometimes fell victims to their wild vengeance, and feuds and quarrels between village and village were often obstinate and cruel. The final resort was to the courts of the Lords Marchers, whose rude and partial judgments recalled to the Welsh bitter memories of conquest and subjection.

To flatter the national pride Henry established at Ludlow a kind of viceregal court, which was intended to manage the affairs of Wales itself and the four border counties. The king had named his eldest boy Arthur, in acknowledgment of his Welsh lineage; not that the name is popular among the Welsh, who, it is said, knew nothing about Arthur, and his table round, till they became acquainted with mediæval romance and tradition from the Continent. Owen would have had a much more familiar ring about it, but then the English people might not have relished a King

Owen. Anyhow, the boy-prince Arthur was sent to Ludlow, and Arthur's court was for a while established among the hills. And hither came Katharine, the Spanish princess, to be married to young Arthur.

After the untimely death of Prince Arthur, the viceregal court was still kept up, under the guardianship of Lords President; and in the reign of Henry the Eighth a sweeping change was made, abolishing local jurisdictions in Wales, and bringing the country under the influence of English laws and of judges appointed by the king. Thus the post of Lord President became one of some dignity and importance. Sir Henry Sidney, the father of the more celebrated Philip, was one of the most noted of these presidents; and when he held his mimic court at Ludlow, his son went to and fro between there and Shrewsbury grammar-school, where he was being educated.

Under Sir Henry Sidney, or, at all events, at some time in Elizabeth's reign, the castle was much altered and enlarged to suit the requirements of domestic life. Windows were pierced in the outer walls, and light and warmth let into the gloomy old feudal fortress; the hall of the castle was altered and enlarged, and became the scene of pageants and festivals, where the reigning Lord President entertained the neighbouring chiefs and men of dignity.

Hither in the reign of Charles the First came John Egerton, Earl of Bridgewater,

A noble peer of mickle trust and power,

who, leaving the then gay and splendid court of Whitehall, where pageants, music, and masques were all the rage, sought in his mimic court to introduce some of the lively spirit of the age. The Earl's councillor in this and his master of the revels was Henry Lawes, "one of His Majesty's private Musick," and the friend of young John Milton:

Harry, whose tuneful and well-measured song
First taught our English music how to span
Words with just note and accent.

To produce something new and original at the inauguration of his patron was the ambition of Henry Lawes, and he applied to Milton to write the words of a masque, which he, Lawes, should set to music. The Masque of Comus was the result, which with Miltonic dignity recites its first cause in the appointment of the mickle peer

With tempered awe to guide
An old and haughty nation, proud in arms.

We may well believe that the central motive of the piece was furnished by an actual incident. Local tradition points to the neighbouring forest as the scene, where the Earl's two young sons and their fair young sister, Lady Alice Egerton, were lost and benighted on their way

To attend their father's state
And new-intrusted sceptre. . . .

And these young people were the first performers of *Comus*—Milton's first and last essay to tune his muse to courtly measures. From this time, indeed, Milton turned his mind to the great controversies now pending, and the Earl of Bridgewater lived to record his opinion of his once court poet—that he was a pestilent fellow, worthy of being hanged on the gallows'-tree.

But the original "Lady" in *Comus*, the sweet Alice Egerton, had more to do with Ludlow. Years after the adventure in the woods, and the performance of the masque, Lady Alice married an elderly peer, Lord Carbery, and after the Restoration he was made Lord President, and his wife came to rule the viceregal court at Ludlow Castle. And here, under her sway, Samuel Butler, the author of *Hudibras*, whose chamber over a gateway is pointed out by tradition, held some small official post in his patron's household. But for long before Lady Alice's marriage, she had lived with her father—and a good deal at his town mansion in the Barbican—and she must have known the "ingenious Mr. Milton" very well by sight, though, probably, they never exchanged a word together. But no doubt she had *Comus* in her library, the original anonymous edition, published at the sign of the Three Pigeons in Paul's Churchyard, which you may now hunt for in the Museum catalogue from Milton to *Comus*, and from *Comus* to Ludlow, to find it at last reposing in the large room as a show volume, with its title-page, "A Maske presented at Ludlow Castle on Michaelmasse night, before the . . . Lord Praesident of Wales." A touch of Milton's latinity here. An ordinary man would have written "president."

Ludlow and its castle went on in viceregal form, with its provincial court and provincial courtiers, its hangers-on, and faded old pensioners, the form surviving, but the life all gone out of it, till the beginning of the eighteenth century, when the Presidentship was abolished. But long after there remained rags and tatters of the old state and dignity—faded old hangings,

broken furniture—and the habitable parts of the castle but slowly going to decay; the grand old keep of Norman build still rising proudly above the ruins of flimsier modern buildings. And thus there is a continuity about the life of Ludlow Castle that gives it especial interest, as it seems to connect us, with but few missing links, with the first beginnings of our national life. And with this we take our leave of Salop, and cross the border to Herefordshire.

IF!

If I could pass as swiftly as a thought

The leagues that lie between us two to-night;

And come beside you in the lamp's clear light,
As weary with the work the hours have brought,

You rest beside the hearth; if I could stand

And lean on the broad elbow of your chair,

And pass my finger through the clustering hair,

And take into my own the tired hand,

And whisper very softly in your ear,

Some phrase to us, and to us only known;

And take my place as if it were my own

For ever—would you bid me welcome, dear?

TRAVELS IN THE EAST.

PART VIII.

"WHAT I want is, Facts!" cried the worthy and enlightened Mr. Gradgrind, in *Hard Times*.

I hope that I can claim no close resemblance to that gentleman; but I own it was a want precisely similar to his, which led me first to start upon my Eastern travels. I wished to see with my own eyes some of the homes of the poor workers, who are living there remote from the fine folk of the West. I wanted to inspect the actual condition of these much-talked-of abodes, and see if they were overcrowded, or falling to decay; and if any of the dwellers were half stifled or half starved. I wished to gain some knowledge of the ways and means of living of these poor working-people; and to hear from their own lips what complaints they had to make about their labour and their life.

If the reader chance to share my appetite for facts, he may thoroughly rely on the reality of those which I have introduced. Devourers of light literature may find diet of this sort too substantial for their taste; and I have tried therefore to mix a little fancy with my facts, by way of flavouring the dish. But my fancies have been based on solid fact; as a good deal of light cookery is founded upon flesh. Some of the facts I have had to handle were unpalatably dry; and some not wholly savoury; and some, perhaps, a trifle coarse.

Indeed, there seemed but little hope of their being at all relished, unless they could be served with just an appetising sprinkle—I dare not say, of Attic salt, but I may, perhaps, describe it as some literary sauce.

The scenes I have tried to picture have been really faithful drawings, done in pen and ink, and enlarged from the rough sketches I had pencilled on the spot. I have not wished to paint things blacker than they looked, nor have I clapped on lots of colour to heighten the effect.

But the reader must remember, while he joins me in my travels, that the dwellings I describe are not the dens where thieves live, or the haunts of wretched vice. Slums they may be, some of them, and foul, and ill-built, and ill-cleansed, and crowded overmuch for either decency or health, and going rapidly to ruin for mere want of due repair. Still, they are the so-called decent dwellings of the hard-worked honest poor, who have the happiness to live in this free and happy land.

A Royal Commission is now sitting on the subject, and collecting evidence from witnesses, presumably most competent to give it, and to aid with their experience towards amendment of the evils which undoubtedly exist. Whether or not these noble people may really lend a helping hand in better housing of King Mob, is more than can be prophesied. Let us hope that they may at any rate assist in the not distant dethronement of King Job, who has far too long reigned paramount in many a vestry parliament, and swayed his baleful sceptre over many a Poor Law Board.

Having thus relieved my mind, I may proceed with a light step upon my last travels in the East.

The sun was brightly shining when I met my guide at noon; and in the gardens of the West I left the lilacs large in bud, and the pear-trees near to bloom. The elms and chestnuts here and there were actually green; and in their boughs the birds were twittering. Here in the East, however, such spring's delights as these were not to be discerned. Hardly a tree was visible; and scarce even a sparrow, while basking in the sunshine, was blithe enough to chirp. Indeed, the sunshine seemed to deepen the shadows of the scenery, to search out its defects, and to show them up in prominence with a shaming, scorching light.

The ways by which we went through the wilds of brick and mortar were similar to those which we had previously traversed. There was little to relieve their dreary, dull monotony. All the streets were straight and narrow; some indeed so narrow that two carts could hardly pass. All were thronged with ragged children, making believe to play, and having rarely anything to play with, except perhaps a sickly baby, or a broken hoop. All were bounded on each side by a dingy, low-roofed row of dirty yellow houses, with not one single inch of ornament, and conspicuously mean in their cheap and ugly make. There were few shops to be seen, and these made no outward show; and even the small beer shops, which seemed to be abundant, had few loungers at their doors.

The children seemed to have the streets all to themselves, for scarce a man was to be met, and only here and there a woman, either carrying a baby, or else hurrying along as though hastening to her work. Here and there a cat was crouching in a doorway, or creeping along furtively in quest of some stray food. Now and then a cock gave a melancholy crow, and was answered in the distance by a still more dismal rival. The shrill whistle of a railway resounded now and then; but that is not the kind of whistle which betokens a light heart.

While on our way through this sad wilderness we had some chat with one of the few men whom we met. He was standing in his doorway, which his large figure well-nigh filled, and he returned with interest the greeting of my guide, in whom he seemed to recognise a friend in case of urgent need. A group of tiny, ragged, dirty little children were gathered near the gutter, and were performing a small war-dance round two babies who seemed twins, and who were sitting bolt upright, and with eyes wide open, in a broken-down perambulator wherein they were close packed. "They're as numerous as flies," the man solemnly remarked; and indeed the simile was not an ill-chosen one; for the cluster of small creatures seemed perpetually in motion, and making an incessant disturbance for no adequate result. I counted five-and-twenty in a space of six yards square, and there were other groups and scattered units in the passage, for it was not quite a street.

This man said that he had been living

"there or thereabouts for nigh on thirty year," and had rarely found life harder than he was doing now. Yes, he worked down at the docks, he did, and he'd most all'ys had been workin' there since he came 'ome from furrin parts. But three days out o' five there weren't no work as he could get, and they didn't seem to keer about keepin' their old 'ands neither. And fresh comers they flocked in so, why you was forced a'most to fight for every bit of a job you got.

As he appeared an old inhabitant, I enquired whether he noticed any improvement in the neighbourhood in the time during which he had been living in it.

"Well, yes," he answered gravely, after much inward meditation. "'Taint so bad now as it were. Leastways, the outside of it. This 'ere place weren't safe to henter scarcely; leastways, arter nightfall, when as I fust came to live 'ere. An' nobody dustn't go much, not even by daylight, mind you, down there by the Blood 'Oles."

The Blood Holes! A rare name this, methought, for a death-scene in a melodrama. And the deep voice of the man seemed to make it sound more murderous. Still, we passed in safety through the sanguinary outlet from the passage where we left him, and by way of pleasant contrast, so far at least as the name went, we soon entered a Place which bore the title of Victoria, though there was little in its aspect to denote a royal residence.

There was a big dust-bin on the right hand of the place, put by way of useful ornament to decorate the entrance. Although not above half full (it being early in the week, that fine Monday afternoon), the dust-heap signified its presence quite as plainly to the nose, as by the eyes it was perceptible. That the dwellers in the court were not very exact marksmen in the shooting of their rubbish, and cared little for its presence, was patent from the way in which a peck or two of it lay scattered on the pavement, and added to the perfume of the ornamental reservoir.

The place contained ten houses, five on either side, and each of one small storey. Every house contained four rooms, and every room was probably the home of a whole family. With an average of less than four to each abode—or apartment if you please—the number of dwellers in the

court, which was some twenty yards in length, would exceed one hundred and fifty. How often the dust-bin, that was common to them all, was cleaned out in the week, appeared a point which should be seen to, especially in summer, by the sanitary inspector.

The home which we there entered was the smallest I had seen, and, except perhaps the dustman's, it was certainly the dirtiest. Roughly guessed, its measurement was about eight feet by six, and not more than seven in height, and there was hardly a clean square inch in either floor, or walls, or ceiling. "Some walls won't take no paint," explained the mistress of the mansion, a plain, unwashed young woman, very slovenly in dress, and wearing one eye closed, clearly not by nature. The walls had once been partly blue, but now were chiefly black and brown with the dirt that had encrusted them. They were, however, much concealed by a collection of cheap prints, some coloured and some plain, and, viewed as works of art, entirely without value. In their subject, some were sacred and many more were secular, and of these latter, some were sporting and others sentimental. I counted seventeen of these exquisite productions. The one which occupied the place of honour on the walls displayed a rather long and lackadaisical young lady reclining on a sofa in a sadly languid posture, while a bevy of small persons, with their hair neatly curled, but with very scanty clothing, were floating in a sort of rainbow overhead. This delightful scene was labelled "The Believer's Vision," and, its gilded frame included, could hardly have been purchased for less than eighteenpence.

The works of art excepted, there was little in the room of either ornament or use, barring an old bedstead with a heap of huddled sacking, whereon was a lean kitten of rather a sad look. She seemed ashamed of being seen in a place of such untidiness, and was pursuing under difficulties the labour of a wash. Some cheap and dirty crockery was scattered on a shelf, and prominent on the mantelpiece was a group whose date of birth it was easy to determine at a leash of decades since. It showed the Queen in a red robe, with a gilt crown on her head, and a scarlet pair of cheeks. She was standing quite erect, between a dapper little Frenchman and a lesser fez-capped Turk. As a sign of her supremacy, she overtopped her brave allies by more than half a head in stature,

this being in their measurement as much as half an inch.

"Me an' my 'usbin an' the child the three of us we sleeps in this 'ere little room," cried the young woman in a breath, and then added in another: "But we've a littler room be'ind you know which we 'ires it all hincluded in the three-an'-six a week."

Proceeding to this smaller room, we found her statement of its size to be literally true. It hardly could have measured more than five feet, say, by six. Two panes of glass were broken in the window, but still the tiny chamber had a close and stuffy smell. A limp and dirty pillow, and a little pile of sacking, lay crammed into a corner; and, except a broken chair, there was no other furniture to hide the filthy floor.

"Mother an' the little girl sleeps here," continued she, and introduced us to the lady, who looked vastly like her daughter, in so far as both their faces sadly needed soap. Mother was employed in sewing a large sack. It measured five feet long, and was meant to hold four bushels, so the worker said. She had to sew both sides, and to hem all round the top. The pay was sixpence for thirteen of them, and she could do "two turns," that was twice thirteen, a day. Yes, it were stiffish work, she owned, and it hurt your hands a bit, leastways till they got 'ardened like. But she was glad enough to get it, for work was precious slack.

Mother further stated that her age was "fifty-two, come August," and that her daughter, with the closed eye, was the only one alive out of her seven children, and that the little girl who slept with her was not one of her family, nor in any way related to her. "Mother keeps 'er 'cos she's a Norphun," explained the daughter simply; as though that were a sufficient reason for the housing of the little stranger, who, she said, was then at school.

While this dialogue proceeded, another dirty-faced young woman, with her hair unkempt and tangled, entered the small room, and her tonguesoon began to wag as rapidly as the daughter's, who seldom let her mother have a chance of saying much. The new comer brought a big sheet, which she had begun to sew. As the work demanded special attention to the stitches, no less than twopence would be earned when it was done. No, it wasn't a quick way to make a fortune, she confessed; but it was better than making hammocks.

Besides sewing fifty holes, you had to stitch two double seams; and half-a-score of hammocks only brought you four and threepence, and you had to work hard to do a score a week. Still, this was not so bad as making labels for the post-bags; for you got half-a-crown a hundred, and it took you all your time to do a hundred in a week. The matchbox trade, however, was by general consent esteemed the worst of all, and my young friend Little Mother was considered very lucky to get as much as threepence for filling fifty boxes, that being more than double the current market price.

Close outside the broken window, in a desolate back yard, there stood a little barefooted boy of four or five, wearing, to mark his nationality—it was St. Patrick's Day—a green bow at his breast. He had blue eyes and brown hair, a ragged pair of trousers, and a pinkish pair of cheeks. Their roses had been washed, just washed, in a shower, or in some soap-and-water, which, if less poetical, perhaps had cleaned them even better, and made him a marked contrast to the ladies of the court.* As a reason for his standing there, they explained that he was "playing," though certainly the fact was not apparent from his attitude, and he had nothing to play with, and nobody to play with him.

Beckoned to approach, he entered very promptly, with a smile on his clean face, and being presented with a penny, and asked what he would do with it, he replied very promptly, "Give it to mother," and departed so to do.

Mother appearing shortly after, I enquired if Master Timothy had performed his promise, and she replied, "Yes, shure," and said he was a good boy, and never broke his word. She was cleanly in her dress, and grave in her demeanour; and indeed her gravity was not without good cause. Her husband had died suddenly when Tim was a year old, and she was left with seven children to bring up. "Shure, they're mostly livin' out now, and a doin' for theirselves, they are; and beside me-self and Tim here, there's but three of 'em to slape upon the flure wid us upstairs now."

"Do you ever see a clergyman, or a district visitor?" I enquired of the four women, who now were gathered round me, and who, though living in one house, were

* Perhaps it is worth mention that in all my travels I only saw one hand-basin.

inhabitants, in fact, of three distinct abodes. I had more than once put the question in my travels, and had been invariably answered in the negative; whereat I had not greatly wondered, being mindful of the miles and miles of misery around me, and the amazing multitude of dwellings to be visited, and the utter incapacity of the Church as now existent to cope with such vast work. However, here at last the query elicited assent—at least from two of the quartette.

"My clergyman comes to visit me," said the wife with the closed eye; and she spoke a little proudly, and emphasised the pronoun as though she kept a special parson solely for her private use. "And he's a priest," she added smartly, as if to heighten her importance in having the exclusive advantage of his visits. But her mother, with a pinch of snuff, appeared to sniff at such presumption, and cried: "Sure, he'll come to any one of us; but why should we be troublin' him, exceptin' when we're dead?" Whereat the sheetmaker, by a nod, appeared to signify assent, and the grave widow said, "That's true enough," and seemed to look more grave.

At the close of this conversation we left these poor women with a murmur of apology for taking up their time, which, however, they protested we had not done in the least. The street through which we went, on our departure from the court, looked sadly foul by sunlight, though my guide said that at night it was really like a fair. There were still a few signs visible of its nocturnal aspect. Locomotive shops were ranged along the pavement, and the hoarse cries of their keepers to attract a passing customer resounded in the air. Many houses in the neighbourhood had lately been pulled down as being too bad to be lived in, and there were many others which might fitly share their fate.

Five minutes of fast walking—as fast, at least, as we could go without trampling on the children, who anywhere and everywhere sat, or sprawled, or scrambled, or scampered in our way—another couple of furlongs, say, brought us well within sight of some shipping, and we soon found ourselves at the end of a canal. As I was travelling in the East, I might have mistaken it for the Canal of Suez, let us say, had not my guide informed me it was named after the Regent of imperishable fame. Near to this, and near the river, which lay hidden from our view by some acres of tall brick-work and some forests of tall masts (bricks

and masts both helping to make up what so often in my travels had been mentioned as the Docks), here suddenly I found myself in a somewhat famous thoroughfare, which by dwellers in the East is known simply as "The 'Ighway," but to which the name of Ratcliff is added as a prefix by strangers in the West.

Sailors abounded here: some yellow-faced, some black, and many brown and sunburnt. Of course, where Jack Tars do abound, their Jills are sure to congregate, and so the crowded pavements were full of fair pedestrians, having nothing on their heads, and doubtless not much in them, except vanity or viciousness. Seen by daylight these fair sirens appeared gifted with few charms that could render them alluring. Nor seemed there much attraction in the caves to which at nightfall they commonly resort. These were shabby-looking haunts, though bearing signs of festive import, such as The Jolly Tar, or The Jovial Sea Captain. Jack's alive till midnight in these vicious drink-and-dancing shops, and if he filled his pockets ere he started on the spree, he will empty them long ere the cruise ashore is ended.

Not far from the Highway, and too close to escape from its contaminating influence, we discovered a small court, which, by way of dismal augury, bore the dreary name of Chancery. We further were informed that it lay near to Angel Gardens, a name which very likely had been chosen for a contrast. Here in a low room of less than twelve feet square, whereof the staircase formed a part, we found three women, a red baby, and a little sleeping girl. The floor was bare and dirty, and the ceiling nearly black. Both sadly needed mending, as did likewise the window and the walls. The eldest woman said the weekly rent was now four shillings for the house, which only held two rooms, and looked scarce strongly built enough to hold so much as that.

She was a widow with eight children, of whom the sleeping girl was one. The younger mother with the baby, who was just a fortnight old, had given birth to three, and the still younger woman, who was stitching at a sack, looked likely before long to increase the yearly rising population of the court.

Near this dirty Court of Chancery, I made my first appearance in a common lodging-house. Really, by comparison, it looked quite a cleanly, comfortable place.

"Everything as heart could wish for as regards cleanliness, it is here," exclaimed, with a proud emphasis, the grey-bearded old guardian, who smacked somewhat of the sea, and the strict discipline of ships. He informed us that permission to slumber in his paradise was granted upon payment of fourpence for a night. There were about fifty beds within his care; not very long nor large they were, but "quite as big as you could hope to get for fourpence," he remarked. Each had a brown coverlet, and looked neat and tidy, and clearly the bare floor had been most scrupulously scrubbed. "You see, it's a compulsory affair," he observed with a smile, and a sharp staccato nod, which was as expressive as a wink. "Police inspectuses us, you know. Drops in of a sudden, and are down on us like a shot. So if we've a mind to be grubby, we must get our grub elsewhere."

He smiles rather grimly as he makes his little joke, and smiles with still more grimness when I question him concerning the habits of the gentlemen who come to his hotel. "Ah, they're a queerish sort o' customers. Queer characters they are, some of them. Leastways, them as drop in casual like. 'Cause we've a many as come reg'lar, an' keep to their own beds. No, they don't bring not much luggage. They've just got the clothes they're wearing, and if they've extry in a bundle, they pops 'em down hunder the bolster. Nor they don't hand me over many walables to keep for 'em. If so be they've got a gold watch, or a set o' di'mond studs, as they're pertickler proud o' wearing, perhaps afore they come they asks their Huncle to take keer of 'em."

Briefly, with few details, I must summarise my final six hours' journey in the East. I saw a score of families in this short space of time, and heard everywhere the same complaining: of high rent for wretched house-room, and of low wages for hard work. Here I found a widow, who contrived with an old mangle to earn a scanty living for herself and her two children; one, a boy of eighteen, having been born blind. There I came across a labourer who had spent a fruitless morning in waiting at the docks. "I was there at half-past five," he said, "but there was no job to be had. I hadn't nought for breakfast but just a little bite o' bread; an' if it warn't for a bit o' baccy as I got from an old friend, I should ha' fell down in a faint." His face was pale, but cleanly

shaved; and his boots were nicely blacked. His wife, too, was as neat as her poor means would suffer. They had four boys to clothe, and two of them to feed, and all four slept with them in one tiny little room.

Near them we found a costermonger, who, unlike most of his trade, had a clean, rosy pair of cheeks. He had been selling mackerel since daylight, so he said, and had been doing "pretty middling," he candidly confessed. He was sitting at his tea, having a score still to be sold ere he ended his day's work. His wife had blessed him with ten children, of whom the first born was a soldier, on service now in India, and the last born was a baby, who was taking some refreshment from the maternal breast. Seven of them slept, together with their parents, in a couple of small rooms, one hardly seven feet square. The sleepers in the back room had their beds, that is, their old sacks, laid upon empty fish-boxes, as the ground was rather damp.

Then we visited a widow, neat and cleanly like her child, who "never saw his father," she pityingly remarked. Her four children all slept with her in one little bed, which was as tidy as the room which made their little home, and measured barely nine feet long by not quite seven in breadth. "I haven't had a bit of dinner, nor tea neither, these two days," she replied to a question; and added simply, "It feels grievous to have the children, and not know how to feed them;" this being said, not in a begging way, but as stating a sad fact.

We likewise spent ten minutes with the wife of a dock labourer, who "drank dreadful" once, and then was "all'ys rowing" her; but who, thanks to my guide's good mission-work, had happily reformed. She had had ten children, whereof the first had died of "cholery," and only four were now alive. The two big lads slept in the small bed, "and the little 'uns in t'other 'un with me and my good man." He had hardly had a full day's work for the last fortnight. Sometimes he'd get a job "as would last him night and day," and then he would perforce "go two days idle, and p'raps more. And that takes the beauty off of it," she figuratively remarked.

Also we went into a cellar, which, some while since, was famous; a poor woman who had lived there, having died of sheer starvation, after bringing into life a

miserable babe. The place was ten feet square, and exactly six feet in height. It contained a biggish bed, wherein slept father and mother, while Jane and Charley somehow lay crosswise at the foot. In a small bed by the window slept a big lad of fifteen; while the eldest girl, who owned that she was "going on for twenty," slumbered somehow in a corner, with a child of "not quite three," and a sister "turned sixteen."

In the back yard, which seemed common to the row of meagre tenements wherein this cellar had a place, I observed two little figures who recalled to me the pair of wretched, abject children who were introduced by the Ghost of Christmas Present to Mr. Scrooge by the names of "Ignorance" and "Want." Stunted and half starved, uncared for and unkempt; with one scanty bit of sackcloth to serve in lieu of clothing; with pale though filthy faces, and bare legs reddened with rough usage, and well-nigh black with dirt; they stared at me half savagely, and then scampered to some hiding-place like two small, scared, wild beasts. Poor wretched little creatures! Who could be their keeper? They were the saddest specimens of civilised existence I had met with in the East; and as I went upon my way—for I could find no entrance to the hole where they were hid—I reflected that the School Board would find fit work to do with pupils like to these. Moreover, I reflected that if living human creatures were constrained to stay in styes, it scarce needed Circe's art to turn them into brutes.

Last of all we visited a weakly, hollow-eyed, poor woman, who sat shivering by a fire, with a lean baby in her lap. She had six other children, one of whom was dumb, and was sitting opposite. Rheumatic-fever had prostrated her for several months, she said; and, but for my guide's help, she thought she must have died. Her husband, a dock labourer, had been near dying too. "It was the wet clothes, and waiting in the damp, as floored him," she opined. Well, yes, she would own that he had once been given to drink a bit; but "he's reg'lar cured of that," she said with a wan smile, and a flutter of her faint voice. He had long since signed the pledge, and had never once relapsed into his old vice, thanks mainly to my guide and the mission-folk who worked with him. "He's a different man now," the poor woman continued, "and I'm thankful, that I am, to them as made him give up drink."

And now I bid farewell to the poor

people of the East, among whom I have recently been travelling a little, and with whom I have certainly been talking not a little, when I found them so inclined. If any word of mine may serve to help them in their ways, or in their work, or in their want, my travel and my travail will not have been in vain. Of my guide I will say simply, that his presence was welcomed wherever we walked, and that I thoroughly believe he is doing much good work.

BLACK LABOUR IN QUEENSLAND.

QUEENSLAND is a vast province of Australia, occupying the entire north-eastern area of that great island-continent. A large proportion of its territory lies within the tropics, and on the eastern coast-face of the tropical section extensive sugar-plantations are cultivated. It is exclusively in the tillage of these—in the words of an Act of Parliament, in "tropical or semi-tropical agriculture" only—that coloured labour is utilised. The work is too arduous for the white man, in the moist, relaxing heat of the low coast country. The alternatives are to refrain from sugar-growing altogether, or to employ in that culture labour other than European.

Cingalese and Chinamen have been tried. The former are worthless, the latter are too costly, and, besides, are no better liked in Queensland than on the Pacific slope. It is from the Polynesian Islands, which stud the South Pacific Ocean, that the Queensland planters almost exclusively derive their supply of labour.

The natives of these islands live in a state of savagery. At home, labour seems foreign to their nature; brought to Queensland, it is found that they become with singular facility industrious and willing workers, with a great aptitude for a certain restricted amount of civilisation. They very quickly pick up a smattering of English, and it is astonishing how soon they learn the rudiments of a trade. They are as imitative as Chinamen.

The Queensland planters send schooners to coast about among the islands and recruit labour. It must be said that occasionally charges of kidnapping are brought against skippers of "labour schooners." When in Queensland last year I investigated this kidnapping question with great assiduity, prepared to believe that abuses were perpetrated. I had not gone far into the enquiry when I became convinced that it

would be a real benefit to the Polynesian islanders were they kidnapped en masse, and carried off to Queensland, there to be educated out of the savagery which now degrades them, and be indoctrinated into habits of industry that should modify the tenor of their lives when restored to their island homes. As it is, this process is slowly going on through the instrumentality of "recruits," who go home after a term of service in Queensland. These are the chief agents in procuring for the planters fresh supplies of recruits. Often they come back themselves for a second and even a third term, and they bring with them a squad of friends and relatives, who have been influenced by their good report.

No doubt the skipper of a labour-schooner takes steps to gain the favour of an island community, with intent to procure recruits. The recruiting-boat has its lockers full of tobacco, beads, and axes as presents to chiefs, and as contributions towards the establishment of friendly relations. A "boy"—all the male recruits are called "boys"—may be willing to take service, but his family may be loth to let him go. Is there any great crime in the removal of their reluctance by the distribution of a few presents?

The Queensland Government has sedulously striven to prevent the possibility of abuses in the work of recruiting. No labour-schooner can start on a voyage without a licence, given only after official inspection of the most searching character, and on its master having entered into a bond for two thousand five hundred dollars that he will refrain from kidnapping and other malpractices, and obey the Act of Parliament to the letter. As a check on him, and further to guard against abuses, the Government puts on board every schooner an official as their representative. His boat accompanies the recruiting-boat on every expedition it makes to the shore, so that he may be in a position to watch that no recruit is carried off against his will. When each recruit comes on board, before his engagement is ratified, the Government agent has to explain to him categorically the conditions and advantages of the service he proposes to enter; and if these do not satisfy him, it is the duty of that official to see that he is allowed to go on shore again. Once the engagement made, the compact entered into, the recruit is of course no longer free to rescind the bargain, as seems but reasonable.

Into all the details of the safeguards against kidnapping with which the Queensland Government has fenced around this recruiting service, it would be tedious to enter. Suffice it to say that with the cross-guards of Government agents on board every ship, clothed with the fullest powers; of an immigration-agent at every port, charged to investigate every whisper of accusation; with a leaven in every ship-load of boys who have already served an engagement in Queensland, can speak English, and are quite fearlessly outspoken; it is difficult to imagine how abuses can be perpetrated, and yet more so how, if perpetrated, they could escape detection and punishment. Two schooners with cargoes of recruits arrived at Maryborough during my stay in that Queensland town, and I boarded both. It would be impossible to speak too highly of the condition which those vessels presented. White emigrants might well envy the accommodation afforded. Well cared for in all respects, the passengers—I know not how else to call them—were as cheerful a set of fellows as one could wish to see. If there was a kidnapped man among them, all I can say is, that in Polynesian Islands dissimulation must have become a fine art.

I fancy the Polynesian is naturally a cheerful, bright sort of fellow. If he be not so at home, he soon takes on this complexion when he comes to Queensland. When you look at him, he grins responsively; when you speak to him, he smiles all over his head. He is a likeable fellow, and has an instinctive politeness and cordiality. He will run of his own accord to open a gate for you, or to hold a horse. He seems a willing workman, and he does his work at once with a light heart and a manifest interest in it. His employers unanimously accord him a good name. He gives little trouble, they testify; he needs no assiduous watching to keep him from idling, nor stimulation to keep him lively in his task. He is an independent fellow in his way—he is a man, and will have his rights as a man; but let him have them, and treat him frankly and fairly, and there is nothing about him of what the Americans expressively call "cussedness." There is a good deal of the feudal spirit in him. He becomes attached to his master, if the latter is a good, considerate master with a kind word for his henchman and a regard for his welfare. After he has gone back to his island from an engagement, he very often returns to a second on the same

plantation; and when friends meet on the quiet, idle Sundays, I was assured their gossip is mostly as to the relative advantage of their respective plantations, and that great is the vaunting of the fellows hailing from those which have an established repute for exceptionally good treatment. But it is not easy to see how anywhere there can be bad treatment. The Kanaka—that is the generic name for the Polynesian islander—knows his rights to a tittle, and everyday experience shows that he is not the man to have any reluctance in complaining to the local official “protector,” if he considers himself wronged. Putting every other check against ill-treatment on one side, the argument of self-interest must be paramount with the employer against doing despite to his Kanaka. The Kanaka has cost the employer over twenty pounds to bring him from his island to the plantation, and his term of engagement is only for three years; if he is ill he costs the planter in hospital charges and medical attendance; and his wages, which are at the rate of six pounds a year, paid half yearly, run on just the same as if he were in good health and doing his day's work. He is too costly a commodity to be trashed away by any ill-usage or neglect. But, as slave-owning experience proved in the United States, there are men so constituted as to be capable of this kind of false economy, if left to their own devices; and so the law of Queensland intervenes with the most detailed and stringent enactments for the Kanaka's welfare, and locates an independent and strenuous local functionary in each sugar-district to take care that those enactments are complied with to the letter. The Kanaka in Queensland fares infinitely better than the farm-labourer in England. These are his daily rations: one pound and a half of bread or flour, one pound of beef or mutton, five ounces of sugar, half an ounce of tea, three pounds of potatoes. Per week: one ounce and a half of tobacco, two ounces of salt, four ounces of soap. Compare this plentifulness with the oatmeal diet of the Scottish peasant, Pat's *toujours* potatoes, honest Giles's scrap of rusty bacon or hunk of cheese! Contrast it with the stern simplicity of the British soldier's ration: three-quarters of a pound of meat (with bone), and one pound of bread! I have seen the day when I would have been thankful to have had a Queensland Kanaka as a chum, for the sake of his surplus rations after he had eaten and was filled. Our

Polynesian friend, accustomed at home to dress strictly in the fashion set by our first parents before the fall, finds himself the possessor of an adequate wardrobe defined by law, and supplied and maintained by the planter. He is comfortably housed and supplied with bedding; his rations are cooked for him; he has what firewood he needs; when he is sick he is sent into hospital, and a doctor, whom the planter pays, attends him. Should he die, his master has to pay his wages up till the day of his death into the hands of the Government official.

It is that functionary's business—he is called “protector,” or “inspector,” indifferently—to use every effort, by keeping his ears open for reports, by listening to complaints from the plantation hands, and by frequent personal visits among the plantations in his district, to put in force, to its minutest details, an Act which seems to leave no loophole for abuse. He is authorised to employ a lawyer to prosecute for offences against Kanakas, and to defend Kanakas in cases where there is a doubt of their being in the wrong. He can bring to bear a great leverage of influence in regard to cases which he may not consider strong enough to take into court. For example, during the twelve months the Maryborough protector had been in office, he had procured the discharge of three overseers who he had convinced himself were guilty of petty tyranny. This the boys revolt against with the utmost keenness. They are willing enough, but they will not be driven. A hasty blow struck by an overseer brings an immediate complaint to the protector. One can readily discern the tone and spirit of good-humoured independence among the Kanakas. They have the port of manhood. They look you square in the face, but with no suggestion of impertinence. They have the air of men who, like the Jock Elliot of the Border ballad, will “tak' dunts frae naeboddy,” and they don't, except occasionally from one another. During non-working hours they are free to do as they list, to go where they please. They have the Saturday half-holiday, when they delight to stroll into town. Sunday is their day for fulfilling social duties, doing a little sporting as they travel. The Polynesian gentleman starts on a visit to a friend of his own island in some neighbouring plantation, with bow and arrow in hand, and enlivens the road by letting fly, with no particular effect, at such birds as he can

stalk up to. The country roads and bush-tracks are alive all Sunday with knots of cheery heathens having a good time after their own fashion. The law averts from them the curse of alcohol. The publican detected in selling liquor to a Kanaka forfeits his licence for life, and the tavern in which the offence is committed is summarily and permanently cut off from the list of public-houses. The protector encourages the islanders in putting their wages by in the savings-bank, and will show you a cupboardful of their pass-books. When his engagement expires, the cost of the Kanaka's voyage home is defrayed by his master under Government surveillance. On the whole I do not believe that any servants can be better cared for by their masters, and more sedulously and stringently protected and fostered by legislation and its enforcement, than are the Polynesian islanders at work on the sugar-plantations of Queensland.

GERALD.

BY ELEANOR C. PRICE.

CHAPTER V. HUGH.

AS Theo walked away with her cousin, the shadow of her grandmother's presence, the echo of her mischievous words, became fainter every moment. It had been a piece of unkindness, of malice, mixed with jealousy, that attempt to destroy her peace with Hugh; but fortunately it had failed, and now Theo did not even resent it much. It was only grandmamma! Poor grandmamma could not be good-natured if she tried, and must always say what came into her head, no matter how unhappy it made other people.

Theo was never angry with her long without beginning to be sorry for her. After all, she could not do much harm; and one need only be in Hugh's company for five minutes to realise what utter nonsense she had been talking, and to be ashamed of having minded it or thought about it at all.

Theo was always happy with Hugh. He was never shocked at her flights, and seldom amused at them; but he often expressed a little disapproval, and never any admiration; in fact, he was brotherly, in an unusually polite fashion. He was a strength, a protection, a background of quiet family affection—everything, in short, that Uncle Henry's son ought to have been. Theo had never troubled her-

self to analyse his fondness for her, or hers for him; it was like the air she breathed; she had grown up in it, her mind resting on his in a faith that asked no questions, and expected no enthusiasms. There was only one drawback—that this dear old Hugh was not really her brother; with that one step nearer, Theo would not have known the meaning of loneliness.

As it was, since her uncle's death and Helen's marriage, she had been horribly lonely, and had spent a good many hours thinking sadly of the future. Her grandmother's house could never feel like home, and yet what other home was possible?

She had not seen much of Hugh that summer, for he had been very busy, and Lady Redcliff's reception of him in his one or two visits had not encouraged him to come again. She had wanted very much to talk things over with Hugh, and had said so in a letter two or three days before this Sunday; but now, absurd as Lady Redcliff's remarks and prophecies had been, she felt a faint, foolish disinclination to talk about her own plans. Besides, it was pleasanter and easier to stroll happily along in the sunshine, and think about nothing, and talk to dear Wool, her collie, when they had fetched him from the Mews, where he sadly lived apart from his mistress.

By the time she and Wool had told each other all their feelings, they had reached Kensington Gardens, and he then ran off with a long swinging stride to amuse himself. Captain North, who had only entered into this conversation by refusing to see that Wool's coat was dull, and that he was evidently pining away, now began to talk on his own account.

He had plans, it seemed, and quite clear and definite ones. He was going to Scotland very soon, to shoot with a friend of his, and hoped to be away about six weeks, coming back early in October. He talked of Harry Campbell and his shooting in an animated way, and Theo listened with pleasure, for Hugh had been in very low spirits ever since his father's death.

They sat down under a tree in a quiet corner, and talked for a long time. Wool, when he was tired, came and lay down at Theo's feet. The rustling wind, the warm, soft sun, the touch of autumn sadness already in the air, all was pleasant and peaceful; it made Theo feel good, and her manner was charming. Captain North, sitting beside her there, ought to have been a very happy man; his was the privilege of

having her all to himself, of saying anything he pleased, but he only talked about plans for running away from her.

Yet even as he sat there, he was thinking that perhaps some day Theo would belong to him entirely, and no doubt he would be a very fortunate fellow. He certainly had no intention of marrying anyone else, and he believed that her fancy, too, was perfectly free. He would not say anything now, from an odd mixture of confidence and diffidence.

If Theo had only known it, that last time he came to the square, and was snubbed by Lady Redcliff, and had to retreat rather crestfallen, though he had found time enough alone with Theo to tell her that story of his father's losses—that day, as he walked away from the house, he had made up his mind to rescue Theo from her grandmother, by asking her to marry him as soon as she would; but the day after he had a cheerful little note from Theo, and then he thought that Lady Redcliff could not be positively unkind to her, and that this tremendous step might as well be put off a little. Circumstances were not likely to change; in these days Theo never saw anybody, and there could be no possible doubt of his own constancy to her. Besides, it would be very inconvenient to him to marry that autumn; his affairs were not settled, and he had always intended to leave the army when he married, and this was a step which just now he would be very sorry to take. Perhaps Theo might not have objected to a long engagement; but the plain truth and the conclusion of the whole thing was, though the hero would hardly have confessed it to himself, that he did not dare to ask her. If she refused him, it would be such a horrid business; their happy confidence and friendship at an end for ever.

"Perhaps I had better not," thought the captain, in a miserably wavering state of mind, which would have astonished all his friends; "and yet there is nobody like Theo, and we must settle it some day."

But he made up his mind that, at any rate, there could be no harm in waiting; and in the meanwhile, happily for him, he could meet Theo, and walk with her, and sit beside her, without the slightest quickening of his pulse.

"And now tell me, what are you going to do?" he said presently.

"I don't know. You have made me envious. I wish I was going to shoot in Scotland," said Theo.

"Yes; I wish you were coming with me, but unfortunately there's no Mrs. Campbell. What can we do for you, though, Theo? You are not looking well. I don't think London agrees with you. Would Lady Redcliff let you go away anywhere?"

"I suppose so; she doesn't want me always," said Theo a little sadly.

Captain North looked very grave. He was much interested in balancing a twig on his stick; but he was thinking what a dreadful misfortune his father's death had been for Theo. When Colonel North was alive Theo had had no troubles, no anxieties, she had never been expected to decide or arrange anything for herself. Her uncle had accustomed her to depend entirely on him, and his son thought this was quite right; it seemed to him perfectly correct that a woman should have nothing to do with managing her own affairs. Hugh North liked women, and was liked by them; but he had a very low opinion of their capacity, although this did not interfere with a good deal of old-fashioned chivalry in his thoughts of them.

"You certainly ought not to stay in London," he said presently. "Isn't there anyone by the sea anywhere, or in Wales, or in Scotland, after all? There are the Tom Frasers. That would be a good plan, because we could travel down together."

"My dear Hugh, there may be lots of people all over the kingdom, but none of them have asked me, and I am not going to ask myself. You don't want me to do that, I suppose?"

"No," said Captain North. Then he added after a minute's silence: "How would you like to go to Helen?"

"She has not asked me."

"I thought you told me, some time ago, that she wanted you to go there in the autumn?"

"That was before she was married," said Theo with a slight sigh. "She does not often write to me now."

"Do you write to her? Is it possible that you were a little too scornful about her marriage?"

"Indeed I was not scornful at all," said Theo quickly. "I wish you would not think me so horrid, Hugh. Nell and I were the best of friends, and I said nothing that could hurt her feelings. I liked Mr. Goodall; he seemed very good-tempered. You said yourself that he was not bad, and you thought about him just the same as I did."

"Could you stay in his house?"

Theo looked a little sad.

"It would be Nell's house too," she said, as if reasoning with herself, and then she smiled and looked full at Hugh. "I think it might be amusing," she said, "and she would let me be alone and do anything I liked, and I should learn a great deal about potters and machinery. And don't you think that I might take Aster down, as well as Wool? It would do them both so much good. You won't want Aster while you are in Scotland?"

"No. There would have to be negotiations. Fellows like Goodall are not always accommodating. They have their own groove, and if anything knocks them out of that, you know, they can't always manage themselves. Besides, Helen doesn't ride, and there might be a difficulty about some one to go out with you."

"I could go out alone."

"No, my dear, certainly not. For one thing, a country like that is sure to be full of rough characters. But anyhow I don't approve of it."

"But you should consider, Hugh, that it is necessary for a person like me to be independent. One is not so very young at twenty-three, and I'm sure I feel old enough to go all over the world by myself, only I should not like it. And there's always Combe. What a pity Combe can't ride!"

"A great pity. But don't begin to be independent just yet, to oblige me."

"I am afraid I have begun," said Theo.

"Well, but seriously, I don't see why you should not write to Nell, and propose a visit. Aster and Wool might come in as an afterthought."

Theo was doubtful.

"I must consult grandmamma. I think I will wait a few days, at any rate, she said.

Presently they got up and strolled a little farther, and then she thought it was time to go back to her grandmother, so they turned their steps that way, walking very slowly. Only too soon, however, they reached the square, and Lady Redcliff's door, and then a shadow came over Theo's face again, and it was with a very sad smile that she wished her cousin good-bye.

"Shall I see you again before you go?" she said. "I won't ask you to come in now, because—perhaps you would rather not."

"I'll do anything you like—whatever you think best," said Hugh, with a sort of eagerness that was checked almost before it was visible.

"Perhaps you had better not," said Theo.

He kept her hand in his for a few moments while he said:

"I am afraid this is good-bye, do you know. I am going on Thursday, and I shall be very busy till then. But, Theo, you must not stay here—you are unhappy."

He said the last words very low, with an earnest, lingering gaze into her face.

"I wish I was not obliged to leave you here," he muttered, as she did not answer at once.

"One can't always expect to be happy," said Theo. "You are not happy—we ought not to be, either of us. It is such a very great change. I'm glad you are going to Scotland, and I shall be very glad to see you when you come back again; you will most likely find me here."

"We must write to each other."

"Oh, of course."

"And you won't write to Helen?"

"I am not sure. I shall wait a little. Mr. Goodall might say I was a bore."

"Helen, perhaps, has taught him that word, but he does not know it by nature," said Captain North. "Well, good-bye."

He turned and walked away, and Theo went into the house. They were both sad at parting. She missed his friendly sympathy, and he was haunted by her paleness and thinness, and by the tired look about her beautiful dark eyes.

That evening he took some writing-paper, and sat for a long time with a pen in his hand. I believe he was going to write to Theo, and in quite a new strain; but prudence or some other unattractive virtue once more conquered, and instead of writing to Theo he wrote to his cousin, Mrs. John Goodall, a letter chiefly about Theo, her looks, and her present position with Lady Redcliff.

CHAPTER VI. JOHN.

ANOTHER week of hot, monotonous August passed away, and Theo was still staying with her grandmother. She was not actually discontented; her nature was too fine for small discontents; but yet she was not at all happy. She missed her uncle and all his old friends; she missed Hugh, and Aster, and freedom, and fresh air. She could take long walks now with Combe, and have Wool to run by her side; but she wanted a wide horizon and an active life full of interest, such as she used to live in the old days. Her mental and

bodily health were both being spoilt by the hard strain of this London life without gaiety or excitement. The only changes of every day were those in Lady Redcliff's temper. If she was not angry, and stinging, and malicious, she was silent and dismal. Theo did not know which of these humours was most trying; but she hardly ever complained of her grandmother, even to herself, and they had a strange liking for each other, even when they quarrelled most violently. Yet it was a bad training for the mind and heart of a young woman, and Theo's face showed more and more of the weariness that Captain North had sadly noticed there.

One afternoon, the deadness, the melancholy of this life seemed more intense and painful than ever. The room was hotter and more stuffy. Lady Redcliff had been very cross all day, and was now nodding half asleep over her newspaper. Theo sat dreaming with some fancy-work in her hands, at which she stitched unconsciously, and her lips moved sometimes, for she was repeating to herself the words of a song about fairy-land, which Uncle Henry used to make her sing to him nearly every evening:

And you shall touch with your finger-tips
The ivory gate and golden.

Ah yes; but when and where? Had Uncle Henry only reached it now, when he had gone away into the shadow, and could not be called back again, and could not come and tell her all that he knew she wanted to know? They had often talked about these things, for he was a good man, and Theo from a child had found religion very interesting. The silence after his death had had a sad effect upon her; she could now feel sure of nothing, and though she hated her grandmother's talk of these things, there were dreadful possibilities of truth in it. Theo found it best not to think and puzzle herself too much, but very often to remember and say to herself the words that Uncle Henry used to like best. That song of the fairies—Theo thought that their country was very familiar to him; she fancied that she herself had looked sometimes with him through "the ivory gate and golden," for, certainly, though he had had many troubles, he was the happiest man she had ever known. Ah, but how far away that bright gate seemed now, that entrance into beauty and nobleness, and a high and generous life. A cloud had come down and hidden it; Lady Redcliff's dark walls shut out such visions most effectually. Happiness, too; the joy of life and youth;

it was too soon for these glorious things to "fade into the light of common day," and that fairy gate, to Theo's fancy, had been the way into them all. Was it never to open again?

She was disturbed in her thoughts by the butler, who opened the door gently, with an alarmed glance at his mistress, and asked her if she would see Mr. Goodall.

Before Theo had collected her wits to answer, Lady Redcliff was wide awake.

"Mr. Goodall! Where is he? What does he want?"

She was not a person who had old servants; they could not be faithful to her, any more than her friends, partly because she never trusted them; and this little man, who had been in the house a month, could not yet speak to her without trembling.

"Mr. Goodall asked for Miss Meynell, my lady."

"I know that. Say she is not at home. I can't have that man coming here, Theo. What makes him take such a liberty?"

"He has come to see me, grandmamma," said Theo, rising. "Show Mr. Goodall into the library, Jackson."

The butler hesitated a moment in real alarm; but as Lady Redcliff did not contradict this order, he supposed he was to obey it, and went away.

"This is a sort of odious impertinence that I will not endure," said Lady Redcliff. "My house to be the rendezvous of all the snobs that your cousins choose to connect themselves with! Do you hear, Theo? I won't have it!"

"I really don't know what you mean," said Theo coldly.

"You are so changeable that I really can't understand you," said Lady Redcliff. "You told me yourself that the man was a snob, or how do I know it? And now, because you are bored with me, you are ready to fly into his arms. You will be staying at his house next, I suppose."

"After all, he is Helen's husband," said Theo.

"Does that make any difference? Does a woman raise her husband, pray?"

"I can't argue now. I must go and see him."

"Well, go. I don't want to keep you from your charming new relation."

Theo went slowly downstairs. When she came into the library, where Mr. Goodall was waiting for her, she looked cold, and stately, and sleepy, and absent to the last degree. He, having arrived full of good-nature and friendly feeling, felt

himself suddenly checked in his flow of kindness. Theo certainly looked and spoke as if she did not want him, and at first the good fellow was inclined to be angry; but then he was shocked at her altered looks since the wedding, and remembered all that Helen had said about her dreamy ways, and sensibly and generously determined to make allowances for her.

"I happened to be in London for a day," he said, after answering her questions about Helen, "and my wife thought I might take the opportunity of calling."

"It was very good of you," said Theo.

She was not sure that she liked the way in which those quick, dark eyes of his were scrutinising her. They seemed, somehow, to contradict the rest of his appearance, which was stout, and solid, and opaque. There was an odd kind of smile on his face. Theo thought she liked him less than on the wedding-day, and that it was a little stupid of Helen to send him to see her.

"But she is quite contented with him, I suppose?" she reflected. "Dear me, how very, very funny!"

"How is Lady Redcliff?" said Mr. Goodall. "I did not ask for her, because I understood that she does not care to see people much."

"She is pretty well, thank you. She seldom sees anybody."

"It is better to have a talk with you alone," he said, taking a note out of his pocket-book, "because you can tell me what you think of this plan of ours."

"What plan?" said Theo vaguely, as he gave her the note, which was directed to her in Helen's writing.

"If you will kindly read that, it will save explanation."

"MY DEAREST THEO,—I am sure you must be tired of London by this time, and I know it never agrees with you. I suppose you have not forgotten that you promised to come to me in the autumn, and September begins directly, and I want you now for a really good long visit. This neighbourhood is nothing much, but you and I will have lots to talk about, and you will feel quite independent of the people here, just as I do. I want you to bring Aster and Wool, and to feel as if you were at home, and to stay till something obliges you to go away. This is all from John as well as myself, and his special part is that he will take this letter to you himself, and persuade you to come down with him on

Wednesday. Dear old Theo, don't disappoint me. I want you so very much. —Your loving

HELEN."

Theo's face softened wonderfully as she read this letter, and she looked up at John Goodall with a smile, which made him smile cheerfully in return.

"Well, it's settled, isn't it?" he said in a loud, hearty voice. "We shall meet at Euston at two o'clock to-morrow. And now about your horse and your dog, can I do anything? You haven't got them here, I suppose? Where are they coming from?"

"Thank you; they are both in — Street," said Theo. "My cousin, Captain North, had Aster at Hounslow till the other day, but I had him up here after he went to Scotland, because I thought I might have a ride now and then. Thank you so much; but do you really like them to come down with me?"

"Of course," said John. "We want to cheer you up and make you strong, if you will let us, and, excuse me, but I think we are setting about it none too soon."

These personal remarks sounded odd, coming from a perfect stranger, and Theo took no notice of them; but she reminded herself hastily, "He is my cousin, he is Nell's husband," and went on talking about Aster and Wool, and the arrangements for their journey into the middle of England.

"And you are coming down with me to-morrow?" said Mr. Goodall in his strong tones. "That's right."

At this moment Lady Redcliff appeared at the door, which was standing a little open. Theo did not seem startled, but a faint shade of colour came into her pale face. She gave a momentary glance at John, who appeared quite calm and unawed by the little old lady's appearance, and introduced him in her sweetest, politest manner to her grandmother.

"How do you do, Lady Redcliff?" said John, stretching out his large hand. "I hope you won't be angry with me for running away with your granddaughter. We think it's time she had some country air, you know."

He was not even frightened by Lady Redcliff's cold, astonished look, or the slight touch of her thin, icy little fingers. She turned from him to Theo, her eyebrows mounting up in an arch of questions. Then she laughed.

"Is Mr. Goodall tired of his wife already, Theo, and does he want to run away with you? You look very happy about it. Well, I am not at all particular,

Mr. Goodall; but you do shock me, I must confess. I always understood you were such an excellent person. I have heard so much of you from Theo—haven't I, Theo? And what have you done with your wife?"

"I left her yesterday in Staffordshire, and I am going back to her to-morrow, and with your leave I want to take Miss Meynell with me for a long visit," said John, grave and unabashed.

"Oh, that's all very correct and uninteresting; I can't give you my sympathy any further; you are just as good as they led me to think," said Lady Redcliff. "I am sorry for you, though, and I will give you a little advice. Don't say too much about a long visit. Theo will be tired of you in a week; she has a vaster capacity for being bored than anyone I ever knew, except myself. She is descended from me, you see, and inherits my vices."

John did not answer. He looked at Theo, but her eyes were fixed on Helen's letter. Then he made Lady Redcliff a little bow.

"You are quite right not to be complimentary," said she. "I have no virtues, and I don't care for the credit of them. Theo inherits my vices. When are you going to take her away? To-night?"

Mr. Goodall did not exactly make any answer. He looked again at Theo; it was plain that her grandmother's account of her had frightened him a little. He turned quite away from Lady Redcliff, bending himself towards Theo, and said very gravely and distinctly:

"You like to come?"

"My dear Mr. Goodall, she is enchanted," said Lady Redcliff. "She is bored to death with me; you can see that in her face; and she is only afraid to speak or look now because she feels too happy. I was only talking about the future just now—and, after all, your wife must be a charming creature, and will be able to amuse her for a week or two, I dare say. Are there plenty of young men in your neighbourhood—agreeable men, like yourself?"

At this moment Theo flashed a glance at her grandmother, by which John was really startled; and perhaps he began to wish that Helen had never sent him on this errand of kindness and hospitality. It seemed as if there were some family likeness between these ladies, after all. But then Theo's pale, beautiful face was

turned to him again, and her eyes, which had just been so angry, were full of sad sweetness as she said:

"It is very kind of you and Helen to want me to come. I like to come extremely, and I will be sure to meet you at the station to-morrow. Two o'clock, did you say?"

"Two o'clock—yes," said John; and then he thought that he might go, and stood up, looking down with sturdy coolness into Lady Redcliff's small, pinched, maliciously-smiling face. "No," he said, "my country is not very gay, though there are plenty of people in it. We have life, but not society, I'm afraid."

"Well, life is a very good thing. Here in London we have death," said Lady Redcliff.

John hastily wished them good-bye, and went. He squeezed Theo's hand, and looked straight into her eyes, saying: "To-morrow." As he walked down the street, he said to himself: "Poor girl, poor girl! What an awful, horrible old woman!"

"A very fine specimen of a potter," said Lady Redcliff, taking Theo's arm to go upstairs. "How fat he is, and how brilliantly agreeable! Really, my dear, I envy you a few weeks with him."

"He is very nice, grandmamma, and there was no reason for you to be so dreadful to him. He is a good, kind fellow, and I know I shall like him very much."

"He is more amusing than Hugh North, because he shows his outraged feelings—a child of nature, in fact," said Lady Redcliff. "But I thought I was charming to him. I certainly felt very much pleased with him for taking you away, and I said nothing but the truth about you. You are the most dreamy, the most lackadaisical, the most easily bored person, with the most ungoverned temper, that I ever knew in my life. Except myself, as I said. I was just like you when I was young."

"Were you, grandmamma?" said Theo, startled.

"Ask any of the people who used to know me," said Lady Redcliff triumphantly.

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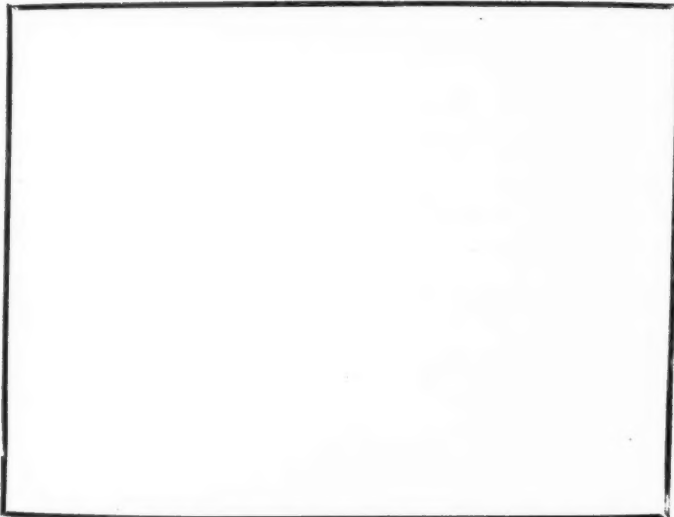
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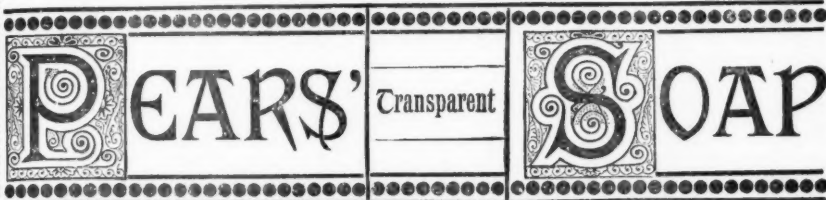
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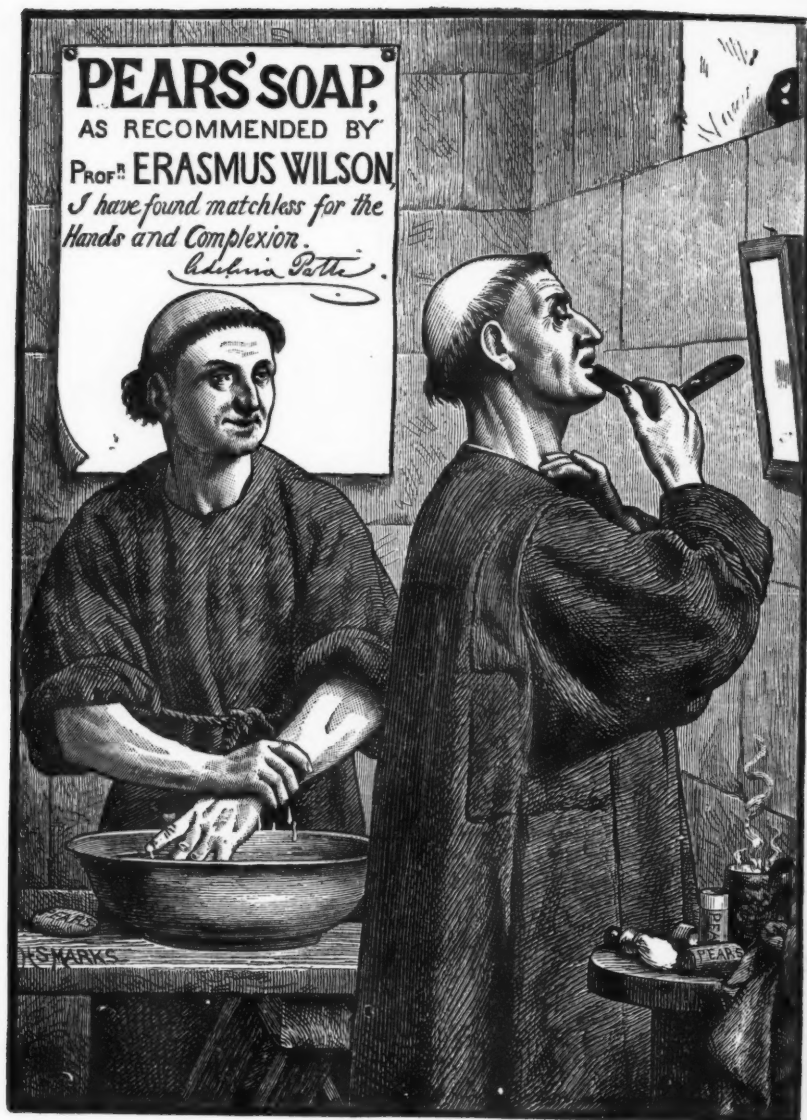
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